

## **Separatist Movements And Movements that Have Affected A.A. Unity**

Strangely and surprisingly, from the earliest days of A.A. in Mexico, in every decade, there has arisen a separatist movement, or a movement that has so violently affected the Mexican Fellowship as to shake it to its very foundations. In 1954, for example, the Society known as A.M.A.R. [the acronym, a play on words, translates as "to love"] was formed; in 1963-64, the rehabilitation centers known as C.R.A.M.A.C. appeared; in 1975, the "24 Hour Groups" movement; and, most recently in 1985, the movement commonly known as *La Disidencia* ["Dissent"], and more formally, as Seccion Mexico ["Mexican Section"].

Indeed, the Mexican Fellowship served as the cradle for the A.M.A.R. Society. The following is a rough summary of the events:

An alcoholic, Fernando Ibarrola, joined the first A.A. group in Mexico (the Mexico City Group), in October of 1946, a few weeks after the group was formed.

Dr. Ezequiel millan, the Ibarrola's family doctor, had often treated Fernando for problems related to his alcoholism, even though he specialized in a quite different field—he was director of a maternity and pediatric clinic. He was enormously surprised when he learned that his patient has stopped drinking and asked about the source of his recovery. Fernando spoke to him about A.A. and invited him to a meeting. The amazing recovery experiences kindled the doctor's interest.

The Mexico City Group started out with a mixed membership; that is, it was made up of English-speaking and Spanish-speaking members; but, the beginning in 1947, the number of English-speaking members rose while the number of Spanish-speaking members decreased. In the early fifties, however, a few more Mexican alcoholics, most of them bilingual, began to join the group.

As is widely known, in 1950 the short form of the Twelve Traditions was approved at the First International Convention, held in Cleveland, Ohio. Thereafter, A.A. groups started to become acquainted with the Traditions. However, not everyone found the Traditions appealing; in particular, a number of Mexicans who, moved by resentment, argued: "The Twelve Steps smack of Protestantism, or Calfinism, and the Twelve Traditions are nothing but pure gringoism." They also said: "This A.A. thing is idiosyncratically Anglo-Saxon, and not designed for Mexican character. Mexican alcoholics are a special breed and we need something that will work for us. The A.A. program only works for folks who are somewhat dour or disciplined, or for boring people, whose nature is diametrically opposed to that of Mexicans, who are vivacious and exuberant."

Among the Spanish-speaking A.A.s who had quit drinking, a controversy erupted that lasted long into the early sixties.

The A.M.A.R. movement ["The Mexican Society of Alcoholics in Rehabilitation"] eventually was composed of several dozen groups in various parts of Mexico, principally in Puebla, Veracruz, Jalisco, and Mexico City. With time, the debate ended, and relations between the two societies became quite cordial.

But let us return to the early fifties and Dr. Millan busily engaged in rehabilitation alcoholics in a clinic now solely dedicated to the treatment of alcoholism, and working closely with A.M.A.R.

In 1957 the A.M.A.R. group still was listed in the A.A. World Directory, and a magazine published by A.M.A.R., *Alborado*, carried A.A.'s Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions, and an A.M.A.R. Preamble, almost identical to A.A.'s.

Thus, even before there was a Spanish-speaking A.A. group in the country, there were already serious problems among Mexican alcoholics. It is worth noting that until 1956, the only place you could find A.A. therapy in Spanish was at a meeting of an A.M.A.R. group.

In 1963, several members of the Mat Talbot Group undertook to establish halfway houses for alcoholics and, moreover, to provide alcoholics with food, lodging and clothing. The centers were known as C.R.A.M.A.C. (Mexican Alcoholic Rehabilitation Centers, Civil Association).

Since this was the first experience of managing such centers, there was considerable confusion, both with respect to applying and to interpreting A.A. principles. For example, there was no physical distinction between what was the Group and what was the Rehabilitation Center; moreover, group and C.R.A.M.A.C. leadership was one and the same.

On one occasion, when the movie "The Days of Wine and Roses" was being shown in our country, in one of the finest theaters in the capital, C.R.A.M.A.C. members took advantage of the circumstances and set up a table at the entrance to the theater with a placard asking people to contribute to the support of alcoholics at the rehabilitation center. All went well and donations were substantial; but some members – "traditionalist," as then they were known – who witnessed the scene, began angrily to protest what they considered to be a flagrant violation of the Seventh Tradition. Things finally got out of hand when a group of member from the rougher neighborhoods of the city arrived and overturned the table, unleashing a torrent of insults upon the alleged violators of A.A. Tradition. Obviously, following this episode C.R.A.M.A.C. members sought other fund-raising strategies.

In August of 1964 the First National Congress was held. At first, the organizers denied members of the Mat Talbot Group and C.R.A.M.A.C. [the same people, in fact] the right to attend. A.A. opinion, however, finally inclined to allow them to attend, but only as observers, without voice or vote in the resolutions of the Congress. The same thing occurred during Holy Week of 1965 at the Third Central American, Mexican and Caribbean Convention.

In those times it was thought that an Institutional Group was a group in which A.A. Tradition could not be practiced. As a result of the aforementioned problems, and others, the Mexican A.A. Fellowship lived in the midst of dispute, discord and disunity.

Around 1974, there was a "revolt" in the D.F. Group and, as result, several members split off to form the "Hamburg Group." A few overanxious members of this group then established an "A.A. World Information Office." This action was severely criticized, since the World Information Office did not have the approval of any district or area, or the approval of the country, let alone the worldwide A.A. approval.

As membership grew in the Hamburg Group, a group was formed to hold a round-the-clock meeting in Colonia Condesa. To cover the 24 hours, the group assigned responsibility for six-hour shifts to four different members. Members responsible for the night-shift had at their disposal a room with a bed. On one occasion, Twelfth-steppers brought in a drunk who had nowhere to sleep and who needed medical treatment. Members of the group solved the problem by letting him use the available bed, and some members acted as nurses and doctors to care for the patient. Other alcoholics who arrived down on their luck were treated in the same way and, in a short time, there were no more beds. Thus originated the "annexes," which are places where alcoholics are treated.

Some members were of the opinion that the "24 Hour Groups" were in conflict with the Traditions, since some of the decisions were made by the leaders, rather than reached by group conscience. Curiously, these leaders were not the leaders of a single group, but of all the groups that were springing up at that time. It was also said that these leaders were action like "bosses," not making suggestions, but giving instructions. Other A.A.s claimed that the directors of the "24 Hour Groups" were receiving large sums of money from the government and from other sources outside A.A. In some instances, members of the "24 Hour Groups" broke their anonymity in the public media—TV, radio, movies, and the press; moreover, they engaged in controversies with some professionals from the print and broadcast media. In fact, the directors of the "24 Hour Groups" asserted that the only Tradition that had to be practiced was the Fifth Tradition.

In the early eighties, the controversy heated up between the "24 Hour Groups" and the "hour-and-a-half groups," ultimately erupting in verbal, and even physical, aggression. The controversy abated, however, after the Mexican Fellowship received a letter from G.S.O. in New York, in which the general manager suggested that we focus on accomplishing A.A.'s singly aim, and that we let other do as they please, and express no opinion on their activities, in accordance with A.A. Tradition.

As the dust that had been stirred up by the "24 Hour Group" controversy began to settle, another separatist movement appeared, which eventually came to be known as the "Mexican Section," or "Dissent." The movement was initiated by members who at one time served at our G.S.O. or on our General Service Board, along with several others who had not been able to participate at this level of service. The manipulation of certain members of the Mexican Assembly by these individuals culminated, in 1985, in secession of eight Areas who then formed the above mentioned separatist movement.

"Dissent" has violated copyright by illegally printing A.A. literature, and by using the A.A. logo in disregard of its protected status as a registered trademark. These and other violations of A.A. Principle and Procedures have contributed to creating a problem unparalleled in the history of A.A. worldwide.

Without a doubt, based on the experience of the A.M.A.R. Society, time and time alone will effect the definitive separation from the mainstream of these "currents"—the "24 Hour Groups" and the "Mexican Section"; since, as we all know, in more than 150 countries there is only one A.A., in essence unvarying, and it is truly inadmissible to make changes that alter the image of what our Fellowship has been, is, and will be.

Copyright "Plenitud"  
Mexico 1993